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# SCIENCE

FRIDAY, AUGUST 13, 1915

## THE RISE OF NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUMS<sup>1</sup>

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WHENCE they come and whither they go are inquiries that should be made from time to time by all institutions in order that they may profit by the experiences of the past and survey the way of the future. Owing to obvious limitations, I shall attempt to sketch the growth of but a single division of the museums represented in this association, leaving to others the rounding out of the inquiry if it shall ever seem to them desirable to do so.

A desire to preserve objects of nature which aroused special interest or possessed unusual powers may be presumed to have been an instinct of the earliest man. We may imagine the cave man storing in his cave the bright gem, or curious seed, or rare animal skin which attracted his attention and, perchance, urging upon his descendants the desirability of preserving it. Such instincts are undoubtedly possessed by barbarous tribes. But such hoards have no permanent value or maintenance as long as there is a lack of a fixed habitation or of a social organization sufficiently strong to pass them from one generation to another. Hence, it may be noted in passing, an essential condition for the existence of museums is a sufficiently civilized and permanent state of society to preserve objects from generation to generation.

In the life of the ancient Egyptians conditions making toward the preservation of natural objects doubtless became more favorable than had previously been the

<sup>1</sup> Presidential address read at the meeting of the American Association of Museums, San Francisco.